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CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF TORTURE AND DETENTION

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council Resolution 1996/31.

[11 January 1999]

GE.99-10595 (EXT)

Situation of human rights in Syria

1. The International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (IFHR) and its affiliate, Organisation des comités de défense des libertés démocratiques et droits de l'homme de Syrie (CDFs), wish to express to the Commission on Human Rights their concern regarding the human rights situation in Syria, particularly the current practice of arbitrary arrest and prison conditions.

2. The IFHR and the CDFs applauded the release of 250 prisoners of conscience in Syria in May 1998 and of over 160 Lebanese prisoners detained in Syria in March of that year. However, they denounce the continued detention of several prisoners of conscience who have in fact already served their sentences. Those sentences had, moreover, been passed in the wake of an iniquitous trial by a special tribunal (the High Court of State Security). Such is the particular case of Fateh Jamous, Bassel Hourani, Abdel Halim Roumieh, Issam Dimashki and Anouar Badr. Those prisoners of conscience were transferred at the end of their sentence to the military interrogation centre in Damascus, where they are being held incommunicado.

3. The IFHR and the CDFs are perplexed by the detention conditions in Syrian prisons, which are, for the most part, incompatible with the prinicples contained in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. The IFHR and the CDFs call the Commission's particular attention to the transfer of prisoners of conscience to the desert prison in Palmyra, where detention conditions are justly reputed to be exceptionally poor. The Syrian prison administration uses these transfers as additional punishment for prisoners of conscience, who include Ratib Sha'bo, Mazen Chamsine, Amar Rizk, Moydel-din Chinani, Mahmoud Issa, Jirius Al-Tali, Nouman Abdo, Aram Khrabit, Salama George Kila, Omar Al-Hayek, Mustafa Al-Hussini, Mohamed Kheiv Khalaf and Abdalah Kabbara.

4. Certain prisoners of conscience are gravely ill. In previous years many prisoners died immediately upon their release because they had not received proper medical care early enough during their incarceration. This failure to provide appropriate care endangers the lives of any prisoner who is gravely ill. These include Faraj Biraqdar, Mustafa Al-Hussini, Samir Al-Hassan, Nouman Abdo, Issa Mahmond, Akram A-Bunni, Nabil Fawaz, Nizar Nayyouf, Wajih Ghanem, Ahman Hassan Nansour, Nizar Maradni, Jirius Al-Talli, Abdalah Kabbara, Ali Sarem, Adnan Mahfoud, Mustfa Rachid, Abdel Hamid Barazi and Mohamed Dib.

5. The IFHR and the CDFs further deplore the fact that, although the General Assembly recently adopted the Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders on 9 December 1998, five CDF members are being detained following an iniquitous trial, the sole ground being their commitment to respect for the rights guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are Thabet Murad, Afif Muzher, Bassam Al Shayekh, Mohamed Habib and Nizav Nayyouf.

6. The IFHR and the CDFs appeal to the Commission on Human Rights and each of its member States and observers to urge the Syrian Government:

a) To arrange for the immediate and unconditional release of those persons;

b) To give the CDFs the administrative authorization to perform public and legal activities as a human rights defence NGO in Syria, as provided for in articles 26, 27, 28, and particularly article 48, of the Syrian Constitution itself, which guarantees "the legitimate right to form trade-unions and social, professional and associative organizations". That right is also reaffirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders;

c) To ensure that human rights defenders are guaranteed the protection needed for their work in the country.